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Highlights of Official Aggregate Child Neglect and Abuse Reporting 1987

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Special recognition is given the state liaisons and those protective service workers throughout the country whose efforts provide the data on reports of child abuse and neglect.

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Introduction

This report represents an updated profile of officially reported child maltreatment in the United States and participating jurisdictions as provided through the National Study on Child Neglect and Abuse Reporting. The National Study is a project conducted since 1974 by the American Association for Protecting Children, a division of The American Humane Association, and funded through the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The information in this report is derived from official reports of child maltreatment documented by child protective services agencies nationwide during 1987. It focuses on the volume of reporting to CPS agencies, and to a degree on the nature of the response on the part of CPS agencies to reported cases.

Since 1976, the annual national analysis of reporting statistics has served to keep a diverse audience of legislators, administrators, planners, and researchers informed on the status of reported child maltreatment. Special analyses of the case data at the state and local levels between 1976 and 1986 have provided a useful tool to CPS administrators in evaluating their programs and in allowing more informed decisionmaking for the provision of child protective services. Other special analyses performed in conjunction with the needs of a variety of researchers have enhanced overall knowledge with respect to child abuse and neglect.

Methodology

For 1987, data on officially reported child abuse and neglect is limited to that collected in the aggregate. Aggregate reporting data is obtained from state level Child Protective Service programs within Departments of Social or Human Services through a survey process. In previous years, this study has also included case data obtained from Child Protective Service information systems. Archive data files from state Child Protective Services agencies were requested for 1987 and are maintained in anticipation of an opportunity to generate a case level data base of information in the future.

Aggregate data collected for this study is limited to overall reporting and substantiation levels. While this represents a rather limited and apparently simple set of information, issues concerning the differences in policy and information collection procedures at the state level make it difficult to define a truly compatible set of aggregate statistics. However, despite these difficulties, if the data is viewed as indicative of the level of programmatic activity carried out by Child Protective Services, they are meaningful. The study also has the singular advantage of having collected aggregate data in a consistent manner over a 12-year period, which allows for a degree of confidence in the identification of overall trends.

Characteristics of Reporting to Child Protective Services

National Reporting Over Time

All states have been surveyed in order to obtain data on report totals, the procedures used for estimating the totals, and selected characteristics of the reporting systems. This survey information provides the basis for the estimates of reporting levels and rates contained in this section.

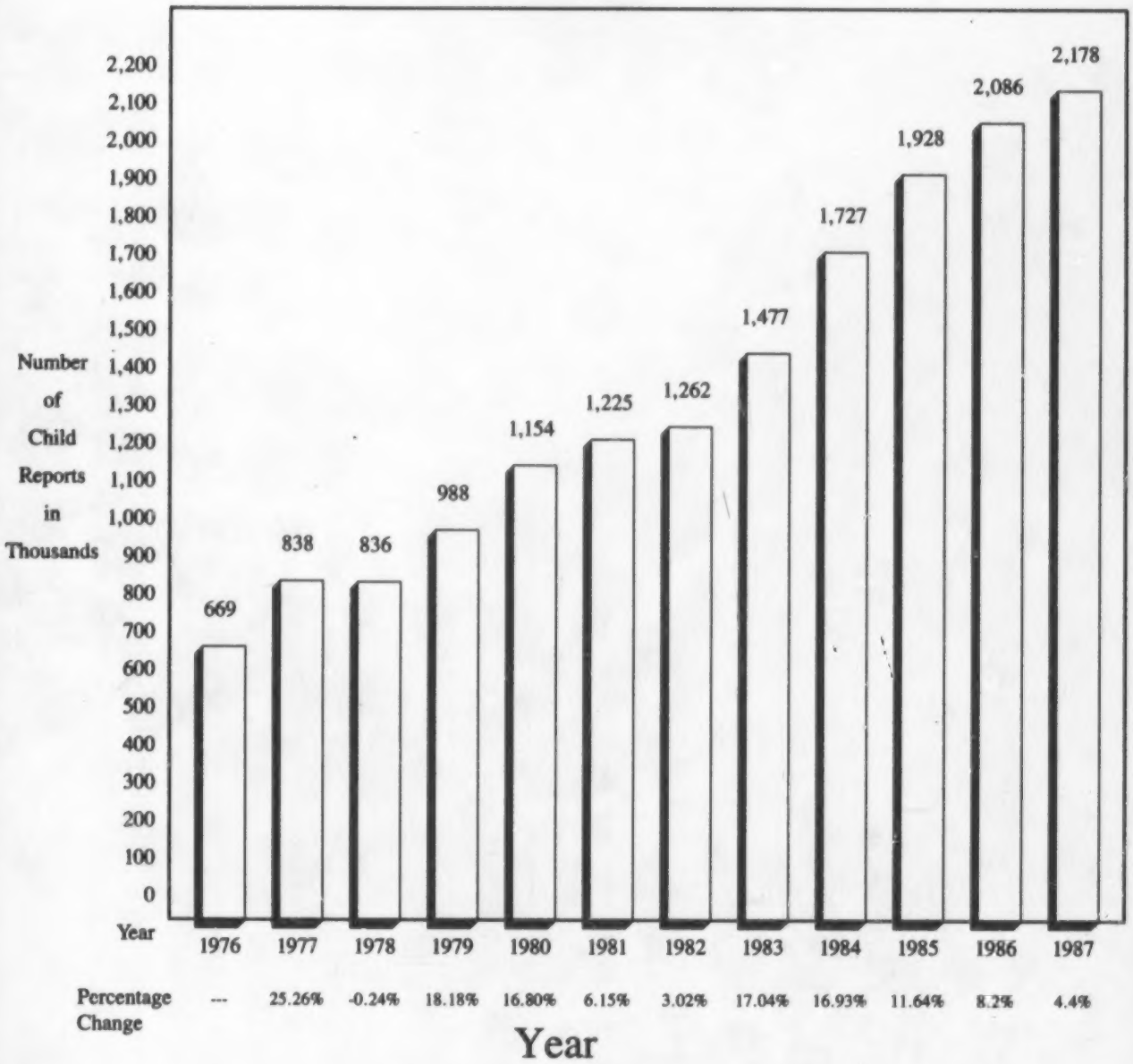
An estimated 2,178,000 children were reported for child abuse and neglect to Child Protective Services agencies in the United States and participating jurisdictions in 1987. The rate of reporting is estimated at 34.0 children per 1,000 U.S. child population in 1987. An estimated 1,404,000 families were reported in 1987. The total number of families reported is a general indicator of the level of activity on the part of CPS, each roughly corresponding to the number of investigations performed.

With the exception of seven states out of the 54 jurisdictions reporting, these totals include duplicate reports. That is to say, duplicate reports occur when a particular child and/or family is reported more than once in a given year; the estimates presented here reflect duplicated reporting.

Information on child report level and rate changes, respectively, are provided in Figures 1 and 2. Overall child reporting levels have increased 225 percent between 1976 and 1987, the only years for which this information is available. Although report levels have increased overall, the rate of increase declined between 1976 and 1982, as indicated in Figure 1. Between 1983 and 1987 reporting has increased by an average of 10.3 percent each year. However, similar to the pattern between 1976 and 1982, the rate of increase between 1983 and 1987 has declined steadily from 17 percent to 4 percent.

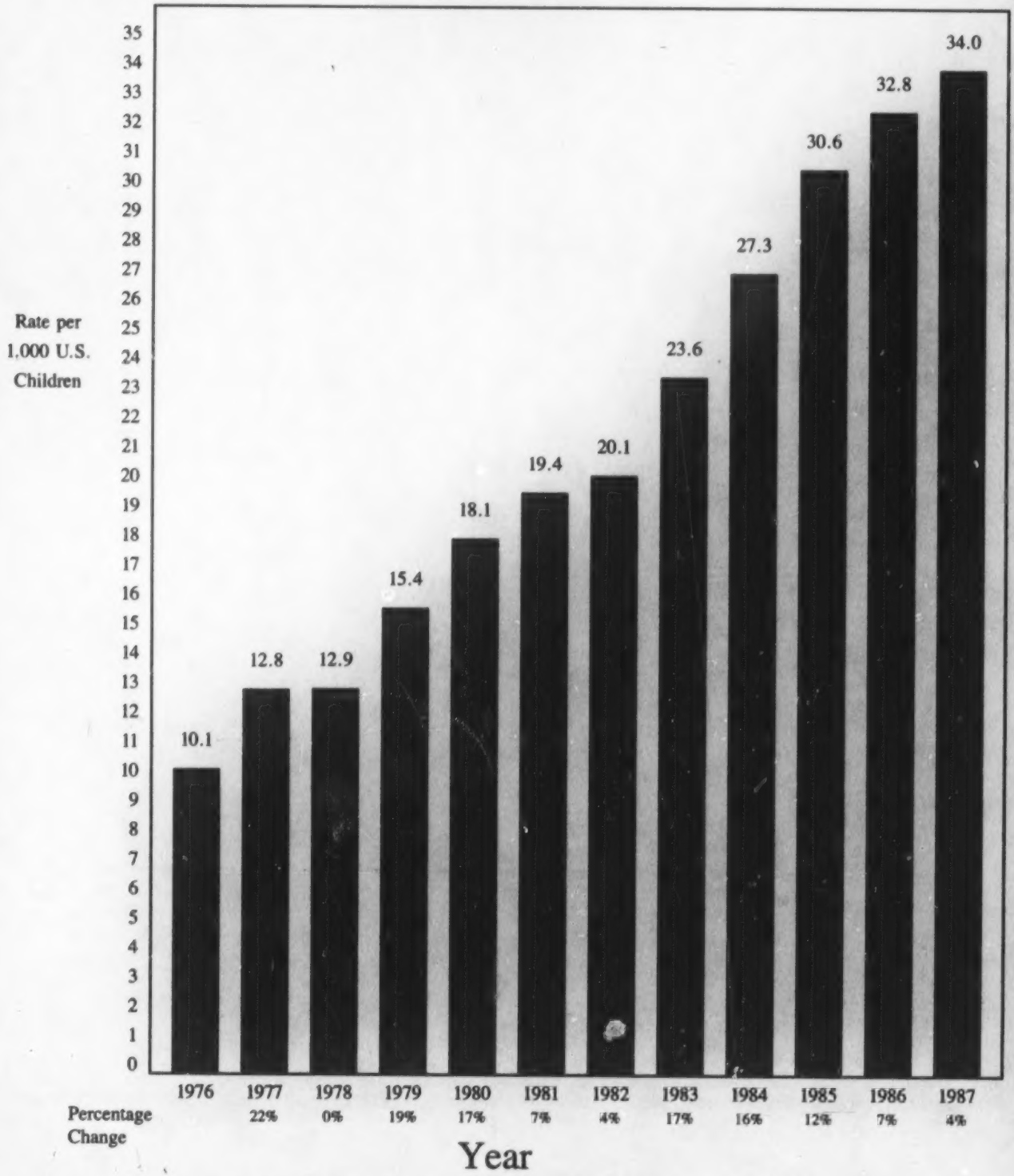
As might be expected, changes in child reporting rates (defined as the number of children reported per 1000 children in the U.S.) as shown in Figure 2 also follow a similar pattern over time. The figures for percentage change from year to year for Figures 1 and 2 are not equal since in Figure 1 only the change in the level of reports is portrayed, while Figure 2 reflects changes both in the levels of reports and in the U.S. child population.

Figure 1
National Estimates of Child Abuse and Neglect Reports
1976-1987



Child totals include the 50 states, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, U. S. Virgin Islands, Guam and Marianas

Figure 2
Child Reporting Rates Over Time



Child totals from each of 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia

Report Totals and Involved Child Reporting Rates by Jurisdiction

Table 1 shows 1987 family totals and numbers of involved children within each of the jurisdictions or as estimated by AAPC staff. These totals include both substantiated and unsubstantiated cases. The child reporting rates for 1982 through 1987 are based on provisional state child population estimates for each year from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988, P-25, 1024).

There is considerable variation in involved child reporting rates among the states, from a low of 7.1 to a high of 59.8 children per 1,000 child population in 1987.

In general, these rates represent total reporting for each state; however, reports from special jurisdictions within some states, such as Native American reservations, may not be included. Among the reasons for the variation is that Child Protective Services reporting systems differ both with respect to policy and practice including those that pertain to how reports are counted. The level of public awareness and proactive efforts on the part of a community and the media related to identifying children at risk of maltreatment also affects reporting rates. It is not possible to draw a connection between reporting rates and actual incidence of maltreatment. By definition, maltreated children and families who are not reported are not accounted for in reporting statistics. Thus, it would be inappropriate to surmise from these statistics that Florida, at 40.5 children reported per thousand children, has more child maltreatment than Texas with 20.0 children reported per thousand children. It is possible to conclude that given the number of children living in each state, more children in Florida were identified through the reporting system there.

Table 1

1987 Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Totals and Rates

	Number of Families Reported	Number of Children Reported	Child Report Rates: Involved Children Per 1,000 U.S. Children					
			1987	1986	1985	1984	1983	1982
NATIONAL	1,404,242	2,178,384	34.02	32.8	30.6	27.3	23.6	20.1
STATE								
Alabama	19,829[F.1]	30,908[C.1]	27.67	26.63	28.10	25.59	21.04	21.24
Alaska	5,502[F.2]	8,576[B.2]	49.86	53.63	47.27	43.53	32.45	22.55
Arizona	25,094[B.1]	40,652[B.1]	44.24	42.66	45.42	23.12	N/A	N/A
Arkansas	14,351[B.1]	29,827[B.1]	46.03	34.48	31.09	32.17	25.89	23.34
California	282,595[C.1]	370,633[C.1]	50.76	48.07	43.24	37.57	35.24	33.71
Colorado	33,343[D.1]	42,521[G.1]	48.71	15.48	15.52	15.67	N/A	N/A
Connecticut	13,074[B.1]	20,354[B.1]	26.89	24.47	22.23	22.78	18.55	15.51
Delaware	3,665[B.1]	5,878[F.1]	36.29	30.82	38.95	50.88	52.66	N/A
District of Columbia	3,416[H.1]	5,990[H.1]	44.04	43.72	45.38	28.94	49.27	39.74
Florida	70,263[F.1]	109,521[B.1]	40.50	50.00	55.25	34.88	39.33	33.25
Georgia	39,100[D.2]	62,712[F.2]	36.76	29.06	25.74	22.20	21.70	18.61
Hawaii	3,258[B.1]	4,636[B.1]	16.21	16.61	14.03	13.84	11.21	10.78
Idaho	8,092[D.1]	12,979[F.1]	42.41	41.49	39.16	35.30	N/A	20.00
Illinois	53,861[B.1]	92,265[B.1]	30.40	26.42	22.47	21.70	20.55	19.58
Indiana	21,658[B.1]	29,344[B.1]	19.96	22.86	22.49	19.15	18.20	15.53
Iowa	16,485[B.1]	25,656[B.1]	35.05	34.90	33.03	31.95	29.52	28.14
Kansas	11,880[B.1]	26,604[B.1]	40.93	37.42	35.48	35.01	32.70	29.65
Kentucky	25,820[B.2]	42,160[B.2]	42.33	39.13	34.30	31.76	31.50	29.23
Louisiana	23,040[C.1]	36,953[F.1]	28.10	32.01	35.79	25.65	24.61	28.10
Maine	4,843[B.1]	10,837[B.1]	35.77	40.99	30.97	44.20	38.54	28.06
Maryland	13,786[F.1]	21,489[A.1]	19.10	16.83	17.36	7.44	13.30	N/A
Massachusetts	34,361[B.1]	52,391[B.1]	39.21	38.60	34.50	33.90	26.31	20.40
Michigan	49,392[B.1]	110,841[B.1]	45.06	38.51	38.31	36.45	34.33	32.10
Minnesota	19,041[H.1]	27,306[H.1]	24.58	24.60	19.36	21.08	14.36	12.63
Mississippi	9,948[B.1]	15,955[F.1]	20.17	19.79	16.41	8.74	N/A	N/A
Missouri	43,691[B.1]	78,273[B.1]	59.80	58.61	57.24	55.13	49.08	42.26
Montana	6,083[B.1]	9,756[F.1]	43.56	34.98	43.77	21.72	18.56	18.80
Nebraska	7,658[B.1]	12,283[F.1]	28.97	29.67	28.58	18.58	12.29	13.32
Nevada	7,533[B.1]	14,405[A.1]	56.94	57.95	55.92	37.59	32.01	36.07
New Hampshire	4,239[C.1]	6,799[F.1]	25.56	15.01	23.96	26.62	N/A	N/A
New Jersey	32,238[F.1]	50,250[B.1]	27.44	27.53	25.31	23.94	14.12	10.06
New Mexico	5,090[F.1]	7,934[B.1]	17.79	18.39	25.49	32.18	N/A	N/A
New York	104,572[B.1]	171,952[B.1]	39.43	35.89	31.83	30.69	21.72	N/A
North Carolina	24,418[B.1]	32,874[B.1]	20.21	21.53	17.39	16.38	17.00	16.84
North Dakota	2,910[B.1]	4,416[B.1]	23.61	24.84	23.95	22.38	19.32	19.37
Ohio	72,280[C.1]	115,929[F.1]	40.88	43.32	22.96	32.87	N/A	N/A
Oklahoma	14,170[F.1]	22,087[H.1]	24.73	24.57	21.94	19.71	16.50	16.66
Oregon	20,526[B.1]	32,921[F.1]	47.99	46.26	41.72	23.33	N/A	N/A
Pennsylvania	12,998[F.1]	20,260[B.1]	7.11	7.25	7.29	6.90	5.39	5.22
Rhode Island	5,732[B.1]	8,798[B.1]	38.42	29.04	46.28	37.57	N/A	N/A
South Carolina	17,069[D.1]	20,970[G.1]	22.28	17.16	24.22	25.84	16.75	25.45
South Dakota	8,472[G.1]	10,686[B.1]	54.52	50.97	45.82	49.25	27.34	25.24
Tennessee	28,535[F.2]	44,478[H.2]	35.55	35.58	38.22	32.98	29.70	25.83
Texas	63,204[B.1]	99,932[B.1]	20.05	23.70	22.63	22.45	21.35	20.21
Utah	11,319[B.1]	18,154[F.1]	28.86	29.44	27.53	23.95	N/A	N/A
Vermont	2,349[B.1]	3,183[B.1]	22.57	27.24	26.95	22.13	18.91	N/A
Virginia	32,224[F.1]	50,228[B.1]	34.43	33.33	34.46	30.00	30.09	28.23

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

1987 Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Totals and Rates

	Number of Families Reported	Number of Children Reported	Child Report Rates: Involved Children Per 1,000 U.S. Children					
			1987	1986	1985	1984	1983	1982
STATE								
Washington	28,201[B,1]	39,349[B,1]	33.66	36.98	33.90	36.51	31.98	36.43
West Virginia	8,626[F,2]	13,446[C,2]	27.44	25.60	33.64	32.69	N/A	N/A
Wisconsin	20,451[G,1]	29,871[B,1]	23.54	22.69	19.01	13.47	7.46	6.90
Wyoming	2,727[B,1]	4,168[B,1]	28.16	23.99	14.49	21.89	20.30	16.30
Guam	746[C,2]	1,196[F,2]	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Puerto Rico	10,036[C,2]	16,097[F,2]	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Virgin Islands	449[F,1]	700[A,1]	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table Footnotes: *The first footnote number, or source code, represents the information source for the number of reports, while the second footnote, or duplication code, indicates whether the report is duplicated. For example, under the column "Number of Families Reported," Alabama is reported as 19,829 [F,1], which corresponds to source code F and duplication code 1.*

Duplication Codes:

[1] Duplicated reports.
[2] Unduplicated reports.

Source Codes:

[A] Estimate provided by state.

[B] Number provided by state computer system.

[C] Number based on a hand count of reports at the state level.

[D] Number based on counts of reports made by local jurisdictions, e.g. counties.

[E] Other source.

[F] Estimate computed based on a nationally derived ratio of children to families or families to children. In 1987, the conversion factor from families to children is 1.60 and from children to families 0.64.

[G] Estimate computed based on the ratio of children to families or families to children from case reports available to the national study for this state.

[H] Estimate is based on last year's data as no data were provided for 1987.

U. S. Child Population 1987 is 63,512 thousand.
Rate per thousand is 2,160,391 (less territories) / 63,512 = 34.02

Information Sources

In general, states are able to provide estimates or counts of the number of families or children who were reported in 1987 (see Appendix B). Among all U.S. states and territories, 70 percent are able to provide official information on the number of families reported (source code footnotes A to E) and 64 percent are able to provide this information for children. For all states, it is possible to estimate either children or families given the information provided by that state alone, or by applying averages derived from data provided by other states (see Table 1 footnotes above).

Duplication

A duplicated report exists when a family or child previously reported is counted again when a subsequent report is made as part of the total reports during the calendar year. Potentially, a family or child can be re-reported at any time either during or after an investigation, also a family can be re-reported regardless of whether it is currently being served by CPS. Most states and territories provide only duplicated counts. Seven out of 54 states and territories provide only unduplicated report totals for either children or families.

Of the 11 states in 1987 that provided data on unduplicated numbers of children reported, only six were also able to provide a duplicated count as well. On average among these six states, 73 percent of the children are reported only once to these agencies during the calendar year.

Case Substantiation

Based on survey data from 27 states, approximately 37 to 40 percent of the children who were reported were substantiated. A national estimate of 686,000[1] children were substantiated for child abuse and neglect by CPS systems in 1987. The number of cases substantiated does not equal the number of cases that were opened for protective services.

Table 2 displays the number of children associated with substantiated cases. The data from the 27 states that appear in this table were derived from aggregate survey statistics.

A precise definition of case substantiation cannot be offered because the definition and policy varies from state to state. Nevertheless, all definitions imply a degree of certainty that the involved child is in fact at risk, and that some level of intervention is warranted in the child's behalf.

It cannot be assumed that the lack of substantiating evidence means that no maltreatment has occurred, nor unequivocally that the child is free from risk. On the other hand, reported cases which yield perceptions of risk without any apparent validity are a drain on the investigative resources of Child Protective Services.

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[1] This estimate is based on the overall rate of substantiated children per thousand children for the 27 states, applied to the U.S. child population. The 27 states in the distribution represent 52 percent of the U.S. child population in 1987. A 95 percent confidence interval estimate for substantiated children would be 535,000 to 835,000.

Table 2

1986 Child Abuse and Neglect Substantiation Totals

State	Number of Children Associated with Substantiated Reports[1]	Percent of All Children Reported Associated with Substantiated Reports
Arkansas	7,967	27
Florida	39,195	36
Hawaii	2,485	54
Illinois	40,385	44
Indiana	8,021	27
Kansas	3,914	15
Kentucky	19,196	46
Louisiana	9,949	40
Massachusetts	17,356	33
Minnesota	11,617	43
Missouri	27,267	35
Montana	4,099	42
Nevada	6,255	43
New Jersey	19,288	38
New Mexico	3,022	38
North Carolina	12,132	37
North Dakota	2,055	47
Oklahoma	7,522	34
Oregon	15,291	47
Pennsylvania	7,192	35
Rhode Island	4,126	47
South Dakota	4,579	43
Texas	52,473	53
Utah	4,976	27
Vermont	1,624	51
Virginia	11,342	23
Wisconsin	10,337	34
Total	**353,665**	**Average 37[2]**

[1] *All states in this table except Minnesota derive their data from a state computer system and represent duplicate reports. Minnesota data represents an estimate based on last year's data, but also includes duplicate reports.*

[2] *These data yield a weighted average of 40 percent. The weighted average used here is defined as the number of substantiated children times the percentage substantiated. These are then summed over all included states and divided by the total number of substantiated children (353,665). One interpretation of this statistic is that if policy for substantiation were consistent for all the states included in this distribution, it is likely that forty percent of all reported children would be associated with substantiated cases.*

Summary and Conclusions

There were 2.2 million reports of abused or neglected children nationwide in 1987. This represents an increase of four percent since 1986 and an increase of 225 percent since 1976.

This increasing volume of children reported for child abuse and neglect represents a monumental effort on the part of communities to identify children needing protection as well as an enormous demand on CPS systems nationwide to investigate the reports and provide protective services.

For 1987, it is estimated that 686,000 children were associated with substantiated reports although the number could be as large as 835,000. For the states supplying substantiation counts, about 37 percent of reports are substantiated. This compares to 40 percent substantiation from 1986.

From the aggregate data, it appears that the percent of children associated with investigations resulting in a substantiated finding have been decreasing since the study began obtaining a consistent count of substantiation in 1985. For 1987, the data available to this study also suggest that the total number of children who were substantiated did not increase. Specifically, the estimated number of substantiated children for 1986 was 737,000 children compared to the estimate of 686,000 for 1987, or a seven percent decline. While data collection procedures for obtaining substantiation information prior to 1985 were not consistent, 1987 is the only year throughout the history of the study when the estimated number of substantiated children did not increase.

Assuming that the data reflect what is actually occurring in the field, among the many explanations for this leveling out of substantiation one deserves critical attention. The year 1987 is the first year that Child Protective Services publicly acknowledged that not all child abuse and neglect problems were within their purview. During 1987, many agencies began advocating for a narrowing of definitions in light of limited resources to serve clients. This shift may be reflected in both the low rate of increase in reporting, as well as, the leveling off of the numbers of substantiated children.

It is not possible to know from these data what circumstances underlie those cases which are not substantiated, however, some combination of the following is likely:

- Variation and narrowing of definitions of both reports and substantiation.
- Inappropriate reporting.
- Insufficient information to conduct an investigation (for instance, the family cannot be located).
- Lack of resources to assist the child or family.
- Inadequate investigations.

The Child Protective Services field has undergone some recent philosophical shifts, which began to be vocalized and refined in 1987. In part, some of these shifts were needed to bring the system to the point where its functioning reflected the reality of available resources. It is still clear that child protective services are not reaching all abused and neglected children and their families as confirmed by the 1986 National Incidence Study done by the Westat corporation. The consequence of these shifts may also be reflected in the concern and increased attention to fatalities as a result of abuse and neglect.

In order to assess the impact of the changes that the system is now undergoing, it will be important to maintain a continuous and consistent set of reporting data.

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Appendix A

1987 Received Data Files

1987 Received Data Files

(As of March 17, 1989)

State

1. Alaska
2. Arizona
3. Arkansas
4. Colorado
5. Florida
6. Hawaii
7. Illinois
8. Indiana
9. Kentucky
10. Louisiana
11. Maryland
12. Massachusetts
13. Nevada
14. New York
15. Oklahoma
16. Oregon
17 South Carolina
18. Tennessee
19. Texas
20. Utah
21. Wisconsin
22. Wyoming

Appendix B

Information Source and Distributional Characteristics of National Reporting Statistics

Table B1

Source of Information for Family Reports (Investigations)

Source of State Totals	Source Codes	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
State Computer System	B	28	51.9	51.9
State Hand Count	C	6	11.1	63.0
State Jurisdiction Count	D	4	7.4	70.4
National Family/Child Ratio	F	12	22.2	92.6
State Family/Child Ratio	G	2	3.7	96.3
Last Year's Figures	H	2	3.7	100.0
	Total	**54**	**100.0**	

Source of Information for Child Reports (Investigations)

Source of State Totals	Source Codes	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
Estimate by State	A	3	5.6	5.6
State Computer System	B	29	53.7	59.3
State Hand Count	C	3	5.6	64.8
National Family/Child Ratio	F	13	24.1	88.9
State Family/Child Ratio	G	2	3.7	92.6
Last Year's Figures	H	4	7.4	100.0
	Total	**54**	**100.0**	